

Press Release

Waste Incineration- Zero Pollution or Zero Truth?

April 1, 2025, Chennai:

A joint Fact-finding report by CSOs and experts conducted over a period of 6 months reveals alarmingly high levels of heavy metal contamination and other violations by the waste incinerator in Manali, Chennai. A 10-ton/day waste incinerator has been operating in Chinna Mathur area in Manali since 2019. However, the communities living in the vicinity of the plant have complained of severe pollution and health impacts since its inception. The residents have particularly highlighted respiratory issues, skin ailments, foul smell, contamination of groundwater, deposition of black soot from the incinerator on their homes among other complaints.

To probe into these complaints, a joint fact finding committee was formed including members from **Visai, Poovulagin Nanbargal, Kodungaiyur Thozhargal, Global Alliance for Incinerator Alternatives (GAIA), Foundation for Friendly Environment and Medical Awareness (FEMA), Chennai Climate Action Group (CCAG), Centre for Financial Accountability (CFA) and Madhuvanthi Rajkumar - Lawyer.** With zero response to the RTIs filed by the Greater Chennai Corporation (GCC), we resorted to digging for information from various sources including the annual reports of the Tamil Nadu Pollution Control Board (TNPCB) and found that the **“red category” incinerator in Chinna Mathur, Manali had been operating without TNPCB’s consent to operate license.** Furthermore, a visit to the waste incinerator plant revealed that **none of the water, soil and air pollution control equipment were functioning** and in a dilapidated condition. Though our efforts to collect soil, leachate and water samples were thwarted by the plant operators several times, our team managed to take a soil sample near the incinerator site. The **soil sample contained about 16 times higher concentrations of Cadmium, a carcinogenic heavy metal.** We also found high concentrations of other heavy metals such as Lead and Chromium. These heavy metals are **toxic to kidneys, skeletal system, respiratory system, nervous system, cardiovascular system etc.**

Our fact-finding report highlights the health, environmental and regulatory issues with the 10 ton waste incinerator in Manali and could be an eye-opener for the policy makers especially because they are planning to establish two new incinerators a.k.a “waste to energy” (WTE) in Kodungaiyur and Tambaram to burn 2,100 tons and 1,500 tons of unsegregated MSW respectively on a daily basis. Based on the experience with WTE incinerators in Delhi and their health impacts, **building two new WTE incinerators in Chennai could potentially impact**

the health of close to 1.8 million people¹. Furthermore, it could have a detrimental impacts on Chennai's climate as they will emit about 6,120 tons of CO₂ per day² which is equivalent to the emissions³ from about 15,30,000 passenger cars.⁴ It is to be noted that even the government's own Chennai Climate Action Plan had recommended against establishing WTE incinerators.

The CSOs also arranged for a toxic tour for the North Chennai Residents Welfare Association members to Manali incinerator today (1st April 2025) site to highlight the environmental and health impacts of the operational 10 ton waste incinerator. The proposed site of the new waste to energy (WTE) incinerator in Kodungaiyur, which is a pristine wetland housing over 50 species of birds on a 25 acre land, was also visited by the participants of the toxic tour. The fact-finding team comprising of Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) and experts urge the state government to:

- 1. Constitute an independent committee** to thoroughly probe into the environmental, health and regulatory violations by the 10 ton incinerator in Manali, Chennai.
- 2. To take immediate legal action against the 10-ton incinerator operator in Manali** for various environmental and regulatory violations. Other incinerators operated by MAK / other companies in Tamilnadu need to be scrutinized and the companies flouting environmental norms should be penalized.
- 3. Scrap the proposed WTE incineration project in Kodungaiyur and Tambaram** which will cumulatively burn 3,600 tons of unsegregated MSW or more than 50% of the waste generated in Chennai which could **potentially impact the health of 1.8 million people.**
- 4. Focus on systemic transformations** in the waste management sector including **capping the production of Single Use Plastics (SUPs), lower consumption, source segregation, and decentralized waste processing.**

Click here to view the full report -

[Waste Incineration-Zero Pollution or Zero Truth?](#)

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<https://www.nytimes.com/2024/11/09/world/asia/india-air-quality-trash.html?smid=nytcore-ios-share&referringSource=articleShare>

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https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/923125/Pollution-inventory-reporting-incineration-activities-guidance-note.pdf

³ <https://theicct.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/India-PV-fuel-consumption-052020.pdf>

⁴ https://drive.google.com/file/d/19kAajQd1K0FcWh_VA43m7-6fuRP0yB6k/view?usp=drive_link